

James A. Mason History



Brigham Young University School of Music
Professor of Music Education, 1956-96
Interview June 23, 2008

Mike Ohman: Can you share with us anything about your background?

Jim: James Albert Mason was born in Eureka, Utah on January 4, 1929. He grew up in Springville across the street from the art museum. He attended music classes and developed a love for art and music. His mom was a painter so it was neat to be working and studying in the museum. He began his studies at Brigham Young University, however shortly after they were interrupted by him being drafted into the Army. At first they wanted him to work with counterintelligence and do officer training, but he wasn't interested in that. Instead he served in the Eighth Army Band in the States as well as in Korea. An interesting story was one night he was on duty and some people decided to drop a bomb on their unit and he had to rush everyone out. At the time he was wearing his "MASH outfit" which consisted of a floral shirt and white athletic shoes. He was asked what division he was in and said the band.

What was your instrument?

He started playing the trumpet, but then later switched over to the horn. He participated in the dance band at BYU and felt a little foolish having experience and having to take the freshman music classes. At the same time however, he realized the importance of fundamentals.

Can you share with us about your undergraduate studies?

He received both his bachelor's and master's degrees from BYU. During his master's studies he worked under Dan Martino and Crawford Gates who he considers his lifelong friend, and studied music education and music theory. While playing the horn in the BYU's Symphony Orchestra, he met Lynne Galbraith, a violinist who assisted him in all of his future activities. We spent a lot of time together as we were both members of the orchestra and later got married. She has been very helpful with any project that he has undertaken and he feels that all of the awards he has received over the years should include both of their names.

Who were some of your students who have continued in the field?

Gordon Jessop, Susan Kenney, Newell Dayley

What were some of your professional experiences?

He taught choral and band for one year in the Nebo School District at a Junior High School in Salem. After completing his master's degree at BYU, he was hired as the band director by BYU Laboratory School (BY High) which was then part of BYU's College of Education. Half of his assignment was research, while the other half of it was spent in teaching. Asahel Woodruff was the dean of the college who became a life-long collaborator with Jim. He started with doing some demonstration programs on concept teaching on KUED television at the University of Utah. One program in particular of Jim's was a televised demonstration of teaching the concepts of the fugue with a woodwind quintet. He developed a program that constantly received superior ratings at all contest/festivals. During the five years he was at the Lab School he conducted research in developing a music program for the Continuous Progress School in conjunction with the Educational Facilities Laboratory at Stanford University. While at the Lab School he, along with Jacob Boss, started the Utah Valley Symphony that is currently celebrating its 50th Year Anniversary. Both he and Lynne played in the orchestra and Jim served as its first president.

After teaching several years he became active in the Utah Music Education Association. He was treasurer for the organization and became editor of the *Utah Music Educator* magazine. The magazine won many honors including the San Francisco's Art Critics Award and was selected by the State Department as an outstanding small publication to be included in an exhibit and was sent to Israel.

Five years after teaching in the College of Education he moved to the Music Department in the College of Fine Arts and Communications, Conan Mathews was the dean and Crawford Gates the department chair. During the next two years Jim taught music education courses and supervised student teaching. He co-conducted the Youth Orchestra with Harold Goodman. At this time the Music Department was located in ten different buildings. Jim's office was in the Joseph Smith Building.

While playing in the Utah Valley Symphony Jim fell during a rehearsal and injured his back. After surgery he continued to have trouble. *The Instrumentalist* magazine in Chicago had offered him a position as editor of their monthly national magazine. The magazine was often referred to as "the bible for band and orchestra directors." The University gave him a leave to take this job while he continued to recover from his injury.

Editing the magazine gave him the opportunity to learn about the music programs throughout the country. He stayed active in scholarship and music education by accepting a six-year appointment to the Music Education Research Council. He had an understanding with his publisher that he would stay for two years and then leave to finish his doctoral degree.

While he was teaching at the Laboratory School, he taught a summer workshop with Ralph Rush, who was head of music education at the University of Southern California. Ralph encouraged Jim to do a doctorate with him. He attended USC for a summer during 1963 before going to Chicago. While in Chicago Ralph Rush died, which took away the attraction of Jim going to USC. After shopping around for another school, Jim was offered a lectureship at Arizona State University to study with William S. English.

After completing his degree at ASU, he returned to BYU. He was doing consulting work for the Manhattan Curriculum Project in New York and the Ford Foundation's Comprehensive Music Program in Washington. This provided an opportunity and resources to involve his faculty colleagues in some of these innovative programs. One such activity was held in Chicago where musicologist Clifford Barns, music educator Rendal Gibbons, music theorist Paul Pollei, performer Glenn Williams joined Jim in attending. Jim and Merrill Bradshaw used many of the findings from the experimental work in building a program of comprehensive musicianship. Another program that involved the entire music faculty was one where each faculty member volunteered to attend three-hour sessions for four Saturday mornings where they were instructed in concept teaching by Asahel Woodruff.

Jim began publishing articles that started with the publication of his master's thesis "Comparison of Solo and Ensemble Performance with Reference to Pythagorean, Just, and Equal-tempered Intonations" in the *Journal of Research in Music Education*. After publishing many articles, editorials, and reviews for scholarly publications he wrote an article for a newsstand magazine, "New Dynamics in Music Teaching" for *House Beautiful*. He wrote a quarterly column "Research News" for the *Journal of Research in Music Education*. He did some ghost writing for the president of a music instrument manufacturing company and edited the *Orchestra News* for two years.

He was active in the MENC: The National Organization of Music Educators. He was elected Western Division President in 1970 and in 1978 he was elected National President presiding over more than 100,000 music educators. While serving as national president he established F.A.M.E., Foundation for the Advancement of Music Education, which is still having a positive effect on music education. Jim along with the president of the American Psychology Association held in the Ann Arbor Symposium at the University of Michigan. A group of distinguished professors from Harvard, Yale, Stanford, University of Chicago, and Asahel Woodruff from the University of Utah were selected along with six members of

the Music Education Research Council. The first summer the psychologist presented papers on psychology and music and the musicians reacted to the papers. The following summer the musicians presented papers on the same subjects and the psychologists reacted. A documentary report was published.

The MENC paid BYU for a faculty replacement to free Jim for the two years of his presidency. During this time Jim spoke at all six-division conferences. He was part of a State Department group of artists who was sent to Rumania to participate in a dialogue with their counterparts. In 1978 he was part of another group of artists who were sent to China to help with the normalization between China and the USA. They were the first Americans allowed to visit China for 30 years. He held a national conference in Miami Beach involving thousands of participants. He extended an invitation to the leaders in China to attend this conference. The Minister of Culture, Lin Mohan, and seven other leaders and directors of conservatories attended.

During the summers Jim was a visiting professor at Northwestern University, Indiana University, University of Texas in Austin, Southern Methodist University, Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, and Simon Fraser University in British Columbia. He lectured at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, China and was the American speaker at the *International Conference on Music Education* in Warsaw, Poland. He participated in two White House Papers and spoke at a congressional hearing in behalf of music education. He was guest conductor of the U.S. Army Band at a national conference in Miami, Florida. The Music Industry sponsors the Annual Mid-Winter Clinic in Chicago where Jim conducted the orchestra in sight-reading new works.

He served on a number of boards including the *Music Council* in New York City, the *Presser Foundation* in Philadelphia, the *Music Education Research Council* in Washington D.C., The *Barlow Foundation for Music Composition*, *Utah's Statehood Centennial Commission*, *Utah's Opera Board*, *Utah's Museum Council*, and the *National Communications Board*.

During these years of service he received a number of awards and recognitions. They consisted of an award from the Israeli government, two awards from *Educational Press Association of America*, the *San Francisco Art Critics Award*, the *Utah Outstanding Music Educators Award*, the *Utah Museum Association Award*, the *Reed Smoot Award*, the *Arthur Watkins Award*, the *Franklin S. Harris Award*, the *BYU Alumni Award*, and the *Life-time Achievement Award* from the Mormon Arts Committee. He has been listed in *Who's Who in America*.

At BYU he addressed a forum assembly. His subject was "The Influence of Music on Behavior."

He has always been active in serving in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He was elder's quorum president in three different wards, high councilor in three stakes, bishop in two wards, and on the Executive Committee of the General Music Board. He served on a small advisory committee in the aesthetic development of the Conference Center. The committee met every Tuesday afternoon during its years of construction. He traveled to Kiev in the Ukraine on a humanitarian assignment for the Church to discuss American Higher Education in America.

During his forty years at BYU he not only taught but served as the chairman of the Music Department and for eleven years as Dean of the College of Fine Arts and Communication. During his time as dean he held a retreat for the entire college faculty at Aspen Grove. Here they were put in small groups with at least one member from each of the five departments in each group. This GO Project, Goals and

Objectives, discussed the direction the College should be taking in the coming years. Among the goals and objectives was “build an art museum” and others were easier to achieve.

As Jim pursued this goal, it was necessary to obtain permission to build the museum; President Jeffery Holland and Provost Jae Ballif were very enthused with this project. Provost Ballif and Jim met with the Executive Board in President Holland’s absence. The Board granted permission providing no University or Church funds were to be used. At the same time that money was being raised, planning for a state-of-the-art museum was underway.

The faculty committed a large pledge of funds to get us started. The Development Office provided good contacts and often accompanied Jim in his efforts of raising the needed twenty million dollars. More than 1,400 people contributed funds; however, the bulk of the money came from six major donors. Their names are found for the most part as exhibit names in the museum.

The architect for the museum, James Langeheim, the University architect Norman Faldmo, Virgie Day, the collection manager accompanied Jim and travelled to museums throughout the country. The Smithsonian, the Getty, the Metropolitan, and the Boston Museums were all very helpful. Jack and Mary Lois Wheatley joined them on many trips. Jack being an engineer and having built many large buildings was a great help and Mary Lois being an artist had many good comments.

BYU’s Museum of Art was completed at the same time that Jim was ready to retire; however, he was appointed director where he was happy to spend the next two-and-a-half years establishing some benchmarks and guideposts for the future of the museum. His idea was to establish world class status at the museum. This was done by exhibiting world treasures from the Vatican Museum, from 23 museums in China, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, and masterpieces from BYU’s own collection of more than 16,000 objects. This was one of his dreams that he realized.